



BILL BRIEF

HB 1550 – Transition to Kindergarten

Key provisions

- Establishes the Transition to Kindergarten Program (TTK).
- Ceases, as of August 31, 2024, operation of programs referred to as Transitional Kindergarten (TK).

Background

The state's statutory program of basic education must be provided to students who are ages 5 to 21, which includes kindergarten. Certain students are permitted to enter kindergarten before or after age 5 based upon the ability or the need of the individual student.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) claims that the exceptions to the kindergarten entry requirements allow for students to participate in programming known as Transitional Kindergarten (TK) *before* starting kindergarten. Despite the fact that the Legislature has not adopted, referenced, or defined TK in statute, school districts and charter schools have elected to offer TK programs under guidance from OSPI.

Funding for TK and other early learning programs

Until 2018, TK programs were relatively rare with about 248 students served statewide. But after OSPI issued guidance in 2019, TK enrollment exploded to over 5,000 students in the current school year (see graph).

OSPI directs school districts to report TK students as kindergarten students, although there is no corresponding statute or budget direction that authorizes this. Because TK students are reported as kindergarten students, they generate state basic education allocations and categorical allocations that include transportation funding, learning assistance funding, and special education funding.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) provides no-charge preschool to income eligible 3- to 5-year-old children. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) contracts with school districts, nonprofits, and private providers for the provision of ECEAP.

ECEAP providers must follow rigorous performance standards developed by DCYF and also participate in the Early Achievers quality improvement system.

Key messages

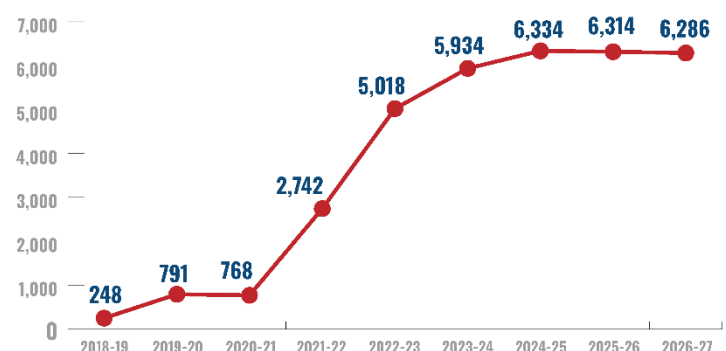
OSPI overstepped its legal authority by promoting the Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program and allowing districts to claim state basic education dollars.

House Bill 1550 reins in OSPI by repealing and replacing TK with a new program authorized by the Legislature: the Transition to Kindergarten Program (TTK).

TTK would harmonize the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) with TTK so that the two programs are no longer in direct competition.

As with any change to an existing program, the bill may be disruptive to current participants of the TK program, many of which have been successful.

TK Headcount Estimates – February Forecast Council



What this legislation does

- Ceases, as of August 31, 2024, operation of programs referred to as Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and clarifies entrance requirements for kindergarten.
- Allows school districts to apply to OSPI to establish a Transition to Kindergarten Program (TTK) for eligible children in need of additional preparation to be successful kindergarten students in the following school year.
- Provides that the TTK Program is not part of the state's instructional program of basic education and is subject to budgetary allocations (like ECEAP).
- Requires districts to meet certain regulatory requirements similar to ECEAP requirements in their TTK programs.
- Directs districts to coordinate with local ECEAP and private early learning providers to ensure districts are not competing with those programs.
- Allows a school district already providing TK to continue offering the program during the 23-24 school year if they apply to OSPI and implement a new TTK program by September 1, 2024.
- Requires the use of a new data system across all state-funded early learning, elementary, and secondary education programs.

Funding information for TTK

- TK students are reported as K-12 students and receive the basic education allocation (BEA) plus any categorical funding the students may be eligible for.
 - For the 23-24 school year, this would amount to roughly \$12,700 (BEA) plus \$1,600 (categorical) for total funding of about \$14,300 per student, though amounts vary by school district.
 - The ECEAP rate for the same school year is projected to be \$12,600 (or about \$1,700 less), though again, amounts vary by region.
- Under TTK, students are funded based on the ECEAP rate, increased by the school district's regionalization factor (if any). ECEAP rates will be determined in the 23-25 operating budget, however, here is some context for how these changes might affect school districts:
 - Without an increase to the ECEAP rate, some districts will receive less funding under TTK than they received under TK.
 - With a 15% increase to the ECEAP rate, nearly all districts should be receiving the same or more funding than they were previously receiving. There could be exceptions for districts that previously received a lot of categorical funding but that are not regionalized under the K-12 funding model.
- **Note that special education funding *always* follows the student and will continue to be provided to students/districts outside the changes in this bill.** In fact, these students will now receive the Pre-K special ed multiplier, which is higher than the K-12 multiplier they were previously receiving.

Reasons to support

- Corrects an astounding overreach by the superintendent of public instruction in creating a new entitlement program that school districts have started offering in the last few years.
- Eliminates a competitive disadvantage for ECEAP and other early learning providers who were on average, receiving less funding than TK programs, and were subject to higher regulation.
- Can help fill gaps in communities lacking early learning providers, without competing with existing providers.

Reasons to oppose

- School districts have already started a similar program and are finding success without the extra requirements. Any threat to that continuity and level of funding puts students and families who rely on the program in an uncertain situation.